Castlemaine Naturalist

August 2013

Vol. 38.7 #412

Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Great Egret, Crusoe res., July Photo – Noel Young

The Castlemaine Bird Club – from 1927 until ??

Chris Timewell and Max Schlachter

On a recent walk through Kalimna Park, Max came across a deteriorating old structure with the following inscription – "Hugh Leach Fountain. Erected 1929 by the Castlemaine Bird Club". The fountain is hidden in amongst well-established planted trees and shrubs, and a little bit off the main tracks.

Later, after speaking about it, we both went out for another look and to take some photos. It got us thinking, and enthused to do a bit of research. What was the Castlemaine Bird Club, and why had they built a fountain in honour of Hugh Leach? And was this the same Leach who authored some of the early bird identification books for Australia?

The latter question was the easiest to solve, with the answer being 'no'. John Albert Leach was the author of the field guides first published in the 1930s, not Hugh Leach. We haven't been able to find comprehensive answers to the first two questions, but we did find a little bit of information by using the Trove database on the National Library of Australia website (http://trove.nla.gov.au/).

On the 27 November 1927, the Argus newspaper stated the following as part of an anonymously written 'Country News' article '*It was decided at a meeting on Wednesday evening to form a bird club in Castlemaine. Mr Lawton M.L.A. was elected president and Mr H. A. C. Leach secretary.*'. There was no further information.

On the 28 February 1928, another article in the Argus – 'Notes for Boys', by Donald McDonald - suggests that the club had a strong interest in the conservation of birds and their habitat – "*They have recently formed a bird club at Castlemaine, with the purpose of preserving birds in the sanctuaries there. There are two of these sanctuaries – the Botanic Gardens and Kalimna Park: yet they were raided by egg hunters. For this season they have enrolled 487 boys and girls as members of the Gould League of Bird Lovers.*"

We then can't find any further references to the Castlemaine Bird Club until 12 May 1953. This is also when we learn a bit more about Hugh A. C. Leach. On this date, the Camperdown Chronicle carries an obituary for Hugh A. C. Leach who had recently died at age 71. As a summary of relevant sections of the obituary "*Mr Leach was born at Bendigo and joined the Education Department as a pupil teacher at his father's school in Oakleigh…….He spent some years in the Casterton, Clunes, St. Arnaud, Castlemaine and Kororoit districts and at Northcote. A man of unbounded enthusiasm he possessed a great organizing ability and will be remembered in St Arnaud, Castlemaine and Kororoit for his work in founding bird clubs and for his lectures on bird life…..His collection of wild bird photographs was excellent and highly praised by the Ornithologists Union, of which he was a member for many years.*"

There are a small number of other newspaper articles that refer to Hugh Leach in passing, and his various activities as a teacher, angler and guest speaker throughout Victoria. Only one of these refer to his time in Castlemaine, and none refer to the bird club.

Does anyone else have any further information on the Castlemaine Bird Club, and why they established a fountain to their founding secretary barely two years after the club was established? How long did the club last, and what did they do? And where did they source the water for this relatively isolated fountain structure. Perhaps someone with links to the Castlemaine Historical Society might be able to find further information that can be included in a future edition of the Castlemaine Naturalist?

New CFNC website

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club has a new website (http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/). For those of you who follow the Natural Newstead website or the Connecting Country website, the new CFNC website is of the same type. You can insert your email address into the subscription box on the home page to receive regular updates from the club. Our intention is that the club will send out 3-4 blogs per month to subscribers about upcoming club activities and recent sightings, plus any other items you'd like to hear about (or if you have something that you'd like to let others know about). It won't replace the hard-copy newsletter, but will be able to send out new information at short notice.

One of the other features of the new website is that most of the Castlemaine Naturalist newsletters from 1991 to the present (pre-2012) are now available to be downloaded as PDF documents. Hopefully some of earlier editions back to 1976 will be scanned in and added to the website over the following months and years. We're also hoping to have an index added at some stage soon as well.

Let me know if you've got any feedback on the new website, or would like to help out with the website management or content. I'm still finding a couple of glitches, so please let me know if you find something that needs fixing.

Chris Timewell (castlemainefnc@hotmail.com).

Requesting Photos for a Public Slideshow.

Around sunset on Thursday 5th September 2013, the Castlemaine Library is hosting an event to mark the start of Spring. It will headlined by a performance by the acclaimed bird-caller and avian-factologist, Dawne Chorus. It'll be a social event, with families and children welcome and light refreshments served.

The CFNC has accepted an offer to be part of this event by preparing a slideshow of local wildflowers, fauna and other items of natural history from central Victoria. This slideshow would be shown in the background before, during and after the performances.

I'd love to borrow some your photos of the local area to include as part of this slideshow. If you would like to bring along a memory stick or CD with some of your favourite pictures to the next general meeting (in August), I'll add these to a laptop on the evening and include them as part of the slideshow. Alternatively, you could email me some of your favourite photos instead (castlemainefnc@hotmail.com) by the 23 August. I hope that you're keen to contribute to this exciting opportunity for the club to promote our skills and interests to a young audience.

- Chris Timewell

Nature Park Sierra De Grazalema, Andalucia, Spain
May 2013

Joy Weatherill

Well, if you travel to the other side of the world, you have to make it worthwhile. So in May, before walking alongside part of Hadrian's Wall in Northumbria in England's north and looking at archaeological remains, and seeing nesting birds on the Farne Islands, I spent a few days walking in the south of Spain.

I particularly chose this time of the year for my holiday, because I wanted to see wildflowers which would be different from those I might see in the Southern Hemisphere. My accommodation was in the the whitewashed village of Grazalema, in the north east part of Cadiz province (at a height of 800m.) in the mountain range - Sierra de Grathalema.

This area was made a "Biosphere Reserve" by Unesco, in 1977 - because of the variety of its flora and fauna. In 1984, it was made the first Natural Park of Andalucia.

The Park consists of 51,695 hectares (highest point - El Torreon at 1654m), and takes in several villages in the province of Cadiz and several in Malaga province.

Near Grazalema and Ronda, there are forests of Spanish Fir - *Abies pinsapo* - living fossils which grew in the Tertiary Period. There are also forests of Cork Oaks - *Quercus suber*, and Carob - *Ceratonia siliqua*.

The area consists of a karstic limestone massif with closed river basins, headstreams and tributaries, and also a mountain lagoon. The ridges are very abrupt, and comprised of jagged crests and a cavernous karst plateau with precipitous edges. The Sierra stands as the highest point in the province of Cadiz - and overlooks all the low-lying countryside around it. Warm, humid winds blow in from the Atlantic and cool and condense as they pass over the limestone peaks, making Grazalema one of the wettest parts of the Iberian Peninsula with an average of 2,153mm of rain a year. (In 1963 - 4,346mm!)

The first day we walked out from the village of Grazalema and high into the mountains. At midday, it started snowing due to a sudden cold air stream, and we spent the afternoon descending carefully in a heavy snowstorm. Before that, views had been excellent, and we had already noted a number of different types of flowers. Overall, that week, I took photos of 57 different kinds of flowers, including five different kinds of Orchid. The flowers were exquisite. Birds which I had not seen before, were Griffon Vultures - Buitre Leonardo (*Gyps fulvus*) - soaring in a group; a pair of nesting Kestrels - *Falco tinnunculus*, and a Corn bunting - *Miliaria calandra*.

Most mammals - for example, the Wild boar and Badger, are nocturnal. A couple of people spotted an Ibex. Generally, everything was quiet and serene and pristine.

Bee Orchid - *Ophrys lutea*

A journey to the centre of the earth

Noel Young

At the July meeting, Julian Hollis took us below the surface geology to explain what is now known about the more extreme depths below the crust. Most people interested in big picture or 'planetary' geology will have some knowledge of the mechanisms of crustal plate movement and interaction. So we can explain the structure of our gold bearing clays, silts and sandstones with their acute folding and faulting on a N-S axis as having resulted from crustal compression from the east when 'Zealandia' crushed the eastern side of Australia as it dived beneath it. The subducted crust is called the Selwyn block, and now lies under about 10km thickness of the Lachlan Fold Belt.

What evidence is there to explain what lies at depths much greater than it is possible to drill? The only direct source of samples is from volcanoes. Julian told how his interest was ignited when he discovered zircon crystals in gas cavities inside basalt lava near Daylesford (contrary to conventional wisdom). Having previously found loose zircons while panning for gold, he had discovered their source, and followed this up with a sampling program endeavouring to map types of crystals to particular vents in the Newer Volcanics of Victoria. Some inclusions in basalt cavities allowed radio-active dating of a thousand million years, far older than any Victorian rocks, leading to the conclusion that they were derived from the Selwyn block. As similar zircon crystals occur in the Harcourt Granite, it may be that the granite is a melt derived from the Selwyn block.

Down to the Mantle (50 - 80 km)

Around Mt Franklin you can pick up rocks from the mantle and the crust-mantle boundary. These are rich in Pyroxene and very dense. Other volcanic locations mentioned by Julian were Tower Hill, Mt. Leura, and Lake Bullenmerri, where you can find pieces of mantle rock carried up from 50 - 60 km deep. These are the only direct evidence of the rock types in the upper mantle.

In the Jurassic (~150mya), volcanics included lavas from even greater depths. Remnant pipes contain high pressure garnets indicating depths of at least 80 km.

Even deeper!

Julian described how diamonds found in Northern NSW were much harder than those of other deposits in Australia or South Africa, and were possibly from a depth of 200 km. It is theorised that carbon rich sediments in the subducted crust may well reach these depths or greater. It is also possible that meteor impacts on the opposite side of the world may have triggered the diamond eruptions.

The core of the earth (deduced from seismic measurements and Ni-Fe meteors) is probably solid and metallic (iron and nickel) having a density of at least 10.

This is a cryptic summary of a very interesting talk. Next day Julian led the excursion at the Lushington Hill reserve, where outcrops of local rocks abound. An interesting feature was a remnant cap of 40 m year old gravels which had been undermined to obtain gold from what was at one time a stream base deposit.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Ancient conglomerates on Lushington Hill

Julian beneath the under-mined cap

Observations

- Reports at the July meeting -
- Several reports of Flame Robins in the district lately, including a sighting at home by Helen Morris, and on Mt Alexander by Geoff Harris
- Some sightings of wattle flowering, especially Cootamundra
- Wedge tailed Eagle circling near the house at Barkers – Geoff Harris
- Orchid leaves and Blue Devils starting to appear - Geraldine Harris
- Birdline report July 14: a male Rose Robin in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens (Gary Oliver)
- Late July - some birds starting to nest. Young Magpie at Rita's place
- A Little Eagle seen clutching a dead Magpie - Barbara Guerin
- A wombat at North Harcourt (caught on surveillance camera recently) -- Chris Timewell

Birds seen on Lake Victoria, Pt. Lonsdale 16th July

Joy Weatherill

Pink-eared Duck ~ 100
Little Black Cormorant
Grey Teal
Australasian Coot
Black Swan

Australasian Shoveler
Black winged Stilts 4
Chestnut Teal
Little Egret

photo - Joy Weatherill

A pair of Shovelers mingle with numerous Pink-eared Ducks on Lake Victoria

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
August 2013

Fri August 9 meeting: speaker ELIZA TREE – Major Mitchell

Sat August 10 field trip: Bushland Reserves

Fri September 13 meeting: speaker DAVID GEMMELL - birds of prey

Sat September 14 field trip: Barkers Creek Reservoir - bird survey

VISITORS ARE **WELCOME** AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2013
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2013 Committee

Rita Mills (President)			5472 4553
George Broadway (Secretary)	georgebroadway@bigpond.com		5472 2513
Nigel Harland (Treasurer)	5474 8246	Barbara Guerin	5472 1994
Chris Morris	0418 996 289	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Chris Timewell	5472 1553	Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345

[email newsletter material to: **noel.young@optusnet.com.au**]

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B